

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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INTERIOR TO SUBMIT MODEL LAW ON TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AT ROADSIDE ZOOS

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today that the Interior Department has drafted a model law to improve treatment of animals at roadside zoos where "too often, inhumane and unsanitary conditions for wildlife exist," the Secretary said.

Udall said he was deeply disturbed by this situation, stating "in this great country where we have always demonstrated concern for the welfare of wild animals such treatment must not be tolerated." He said the Department was taking the lead in proposing corrective action because of its general responsibility for conservation of natural resources and because instances of animal mistreatment were widespread.

Since the States have primary responsibility, the model law will be submitted to the Council of State Governments for its sponsorship as a legislative proposal. The purpose is to encourage adoption of uniform statutes in all States for care of wild animals held in captivity.

The model law calls for State fish and game agencies to appoint committees of "recognized experts" to develop standards for exhibiting wildlife. These standards would have to be met before permits would be issued, and inspections of facilities would be authorized to insure continued acceptability.

Secretary Udall said that many citizens and organizations have expressed outrage about conditions at many commercial roadside zoos, menageries and snake pits. "Complaints also concern the condition of wild animal exhibits

at many filling stations, souvenir shops, refreshment stands, and other businesses catering to tourists," the Secretary said.

The Secretary said cruelty and cramped quarters were among the most frequent complaints. He also cited "shocking" sanitary conditions at some exhibits where the filth was not only repugnant to the viewer but a public health hazard as well. Larger animals, he said, are sometimes cruelly chained and are even tormented to make them appear ferocious.

Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife verified these complaints and surveyed with State wildlife agencies the regulations on exhibition of wildlife. It found only 17 States issued zoo or menagerie permits, with only 9 of these prescribing written minimum standards for operating these facilities. All 50 States responded to the survey, which was conducted from BSWF's regional headquarters at Minneapolis.

The mistreatment of caged specimens is spread all over the country, according to the survey, although some "roadside zoos" are operated well and by trained people.

The model law will be accompanied by "Recommended Minimal Standards for Wildlife Exhibitors" which include feeding schedules, cage sizes and other specifications.

The model law has been endorsed by a number of wildlife organizations and humane societies.

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